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## Practice Makes 'Museum People'

Inkeri Hakamies\*

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### Abstract

This article examines how museum work is evaluated, and how it affects museum professionals' identities. The empirical material consists of biographical interviews of Finnish museum professionals. The key concept for the analysis is 'museum people', which represents the ideal museum workers. As a community of practice 'museum people' are defined by what they do – 'proper' museum work. Analyzing the defining practices and elements of the community also reveals that it is placed in a time and space of its own. Reflecting oneself to 'museum people' and their practices can be elemental for the identity work of a museum professional.

**Keywords:** Museum work, practices, community of practice, professional identity

### Communities of Museum Practice

In this article I examine how 'proper' museum work is defined, and how doing – or not doing – museum work affects the professional identity of people in the museum field. The study is inspired by the framework of Practice Theory and specifically the concept of *community of practice* as defined by Etienne Wenger (1998). The empirical material consists of oral history interviews illustrating the Finnish museum field of the latter half of the twentieth century.

My analytical process could be described as a compromise between material- and theory-based approaches, and my focus has developed in a hermeneutical circle alongside gathering material and consulting theoretical literature. While reading the interview transcriptions, my attention was drawn to the concept of 'museum people'. I found the use of the term very interesting, and realised that it was loaded with meanings: when talking about 'museum people' the interview partners were also talking about museum work, professional identity and recognition, and dissonance in their working communities. These became the themes with which I started to 'rake' the material.

To find out more about the relationship between 'doing' and being a museum professional, I have examined the 'museum people' as a community of practice. My analytical questions are: How could 'museum people' be defined, and why aren't all museum workers 'museum people'? What are the significant practices and elements that connect or separate museum workers? What do 'museum people' do – or what *should* they be doing? For the purposes of this study, 'museum people' should be understood as a metaphor for the notion of an 'ideal museum professional'. It should be clarified that 'museum people' may not have been mentioned in every interview and the concept itself is probably not as significant to the interviewees as it is to my analytical process. Other central concepts for this paper are *community*, *practices*, and *community of practice*.

As Amelia Wong has discussed, the concept of 'community' can carry several different connotations in the museum context. It can refer to museum professionals as a group, the 'public sphere', the 'people', or museums' source communities. Generally, it has been linked to collaboration, and according to Wong it has 'overly romantic yearnings' (Wong 2015: 297, 311.) In this study, my use of the word 'community' is not intended as a normative action. On the contrary, I am interested in how the communities are construed in the interview material, and how 'museum people' especially are imagined through practices – including those 'romantic yearnings'.

There are several ways to describe 'practices', but my own understanding is that 'practice' is a commonly acknowledged way of doing something. A practice can contain variation, and in Andreas Reckwitz's words it consists of 'single and often unique actions reproducing the practice' (Reckwitz 2002: 250). As Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson have formulated, practices consist of varying elements, but they only take their form when performed. (Shove et al. 2012: 7). As a performance practice requires other people – an audience – to interpret it, and therefore practices are fundamentally social and contextual. Practices also always include both an explicit and tacit side, and as they are carried out, they express and reproduce certain meanings and values acknowledged by others (Wenger 1998: 47).

Community of practice, therefore, is a community that can be defined through its practices. It can also be understood as a context, through which practices get their meaning. Being able to participate in a community of practice, and doing the same things as others *with* others, can be very important to one's identity. According to Wenger, when we act in a community of practice where we are full members we feel like moving on familiar ground: we know how to act and can interpret the actions of others, we feel competent and others recognise us as such, and our ability to influence the shared practices also shapes our experience of participation. (Wenger 1998: 4, 56-57, 152). For other uses of the concept specifically in museum studies, see e.g. Marty et al. 2013; Kelly and Gordon 2003.) But a community of practice has its boundaries: there are always those who are excluded from the practices.

### Studying Finnish Museum Professionals

The empirical material of this study consists of interviews produced as part of a Finnish museum history project, which was launched in 2005. It was coordinated by *Suomen Museoliitto* (Finnish Museums Association)<sup>1</sup> and implemented together with *Museovirasto* (National Board of Antiquities)<sup>2</sup>, *Luonnontieteellinen keskusmuseo* (Finnish Museum of Natural History)<sup>3</sup>, *Kansalliskallio* (Finnish National Gallery)<sup>4</sup>, and the departments of museology at the Universities of Helsinki, Jyväskylä and Turku<sup>5</sup>. The project's main objective was to publish a history of Finland's museums (Pettersson and Kinanen 2010), but the coordinators also urged museum organizations to write their own histories and collect oral history from the field. This was done by encouraging museum staff to interview their museums' senior employees.

Altogether there are 52 interviews which are archived in various organizations and listed in the project's database.<sup>6</sup> Geographically they focus on the capital-region of Finland and mostly represent big national museum organizations, such as the National Gallery, the Museums Association, and the National Board of Antiquities, which also includes the National Museum of Finland.

The material presents many challenges for the study at hand. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, and the interviewees have given their consent to the material being used for research purposes and for quotes from the interviews to be published under their name. The interviewers, however, were not explicitly asked for such consent, and therefore I have decided to keep their identities hidden. Two of the interviews used in this study were carried out as part of a master's thesis project,<sup>7</sup> but usually the interviewers' backgrounds were not explained. In some cases, the interviewers are not even named on the record. Perhaps their output was not regarded as important as the interviewees', but naturally their impact on producing the material was undeniably significant.

First of all, the interviewers controlled the interview situation and posed the questions. The project provided a biographical, semi-structural outline of questions<sup>8</sup>, but the proceedings of the interviews varied. For example, sometimes the interviewees' background information (date of birth, etc.) have been recorded, but not always. Depending on the interviewer, the objective of the meeting might have been to get complementary information about the history of the museum's collections. The interviews made by the master's student are constructed on the same outline of questions, but mainly focus on gender issues in Finnish museum history. However, often the interviewer and the interviewee were friends or old colleagues and the conversations were more personal. To my knowledge, the interviewers were also free to select the people to be interviewed, and the choices they've made reflect their understanding of who is a noteworthy actor in the museum field. It could also be regarded as an expression of

who are proper 'museum people'. Most of the interviewees were curators or other personnel working with museum collections or museum policies.

As the material was already gathered before the beginning of my own research, I have not been able to affect the proceedings of the interviews. Despite its challenges, I still believe the material to be useful, especially when the interview partners were friends or old colleagues: They could talk more freely, reminisce about the past together, and touch upon themes that I would not have known about.

In this article I draw examples from ten interviews, which were carried out between 2007 and 2011. The interviewees in question, one man and nine women, all entered the museum sector in the 1960s or 1970s and worked for the National Board of Antiquities (or its institutional predecessor) at some point in their career. The original language of the material is Finnish. All transcriptions and translations are my own.

### **'Museum People' and Echoes of History**

*An expression that caught my attention in the material was the term 'museum people' (In Finnish museoihmiset or museoväki; the latter could also be translated as 'museum folks'). Renée Friedman (1982, repr. 2005: 126), who uses the term 'museum people' in the meaning of museum professionals, believes that museum people tend to be 'highly individualistic' and 'not especially co-operative'. But to many of the interviewees – and interviewers – the term has a different ring to it.*

*For example, one interviewee, a conservator, asks her interviewers: 'Have you noticed that museum people are usually nice?' She and her interviewers then agree that one can very easily reach mutual understanding between museum people.<sup>9</sup> According to their description, it would seem that 'museum people' form the model community of practice: Its members share a devotion and a 'discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world', as well as an absence of introductory preambles in conversation (Wenger 1998: 125-126).*

Even when 'museum people' are not specifically mentioned, many interviewees describe a strong community working together for a joint enterprise, clearly meeting several of Wenger's indicators implying a community of practice has formed: discursive elements, such as absence of introductory preambles, jargon and local lore, and mutual understanding of who belongs and how each member can contribute to the shared enterprise (Wenger 1998: 125-126). In the following example the interviewer and the interviewee are old colleagues from the National Museum. The conversation between them flows freely, sharing 'inside jokes' and 'knowing laughter' (Wenger 1998, 125-126), and together they reminisce about the ethnological field work trips that the museum carried out until the 1970s. The projects were joint efforts of the whole ethnological department, and both of the interview partners agreed that the excursions certainly raised the 'department's team spirit'. As the interviewer put it:

And the motivation was so, I mean everyone was so motivated for the work, that... - - Everything was so important, each part was important and everyone knew that their part was important, and that, I felt, created like and filled people with sort of hope...<sup>10</sup>

In the ideal community of museum workers, everybody had their own place and purpose, and one key element seems to be inclusion. As Wenger explains, '[b]eing included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community's practice' (Wenger 1998: 74). For the interviewees the 'things that mattered' could be as simple as socializing with the colleagues, starting the day together over a cup of coffee and discussing 'what you're doing – the substance'.<sup>11</sup> As Wenger also points out, for being included it can be equally 'important to know and understand the latest gossip as it is to know and understand the latest memo' (Wenger 1998: 74). These practices could also serve as entering points for new-comers to the community. As one younger interviewer declares, the morning meetings and coffee breaks, where the group talked about the work at hand, were 'a really important institution' for younger employees as well.<sup>12</sup>

Other elements that combine the community are time and space. The aspect of time includes both the 'present', in which members of the community worked together as colleagues,

but also a shared history. The past, and origin of the whole professional field, was materialized in the physical National Museum. As for the following interviewee, working in the museum building signified a certain status, and the act of going through the same doors as so many museum personas before made her part of the same chain:

The National Museum was so fantastic- I thought, it was really incredible to be there...! I mean when you enter the building from the courtyard side, through the door, you just enjoyed it immensely! I remember one time, I was coming, and Doctor Cleve just stepped out of the door and the door slammed shut behind him, and he saw that I was coming through the gate, and he got out his key and opened the door for me. He had told in a lecture - about former museum workers, and he had told... I think it was Appelgren-Kivalo, who was this old museum man, and an archaeologist, yeah... Who had once come out through the same door and a very young Nils Cleve had tried to catch it, and Appelgren-Kivalo had slammed the door shut and said that students shouldn't think that they can come in with the director... - - And I thought there was somehow... echoes of history, when he, Nils Cleve, turned around and opened the door for me.<sup>13</sup>

It is striking that in several cases the ideal communities could be found in the past, before the work practices began to change: When the museum still did fieldwork trips and people had time to socialize and discuss the work together: 'Now we no longer talk about the substance, but now we talk about how these new fancy computers work, or don't work'.<sup>14</sup> The style, in which the 'museum people' are imagined, seems to be *nostalgia*. In my opinion, the longing for the past evident in the material reflects both 'endo-nostalgia' – nostalgia for the past one has lived personally – as well as 'exo-nostalgia' – a sense of losing something important albeit not personally experienced (Berliner 2015: 21). The field work trips or coffee breaks might be pleasant memories for personal reasons, but losing the possibilities to continue those practices also represents an unwanted change, for some at least, in the history of the profession. (For further discussion of nostalgia and ethnographic fieldwork of museum professionals, see Snellman 2016.)

But, as Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko point out, 'longing in nostalgia is never longing for a specific past as much as it is longing for longing itself' (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2015: 65). Nostalgia in the interview material then serves two purposes. On one hand, there is the past community of 'museum people', which stirs endo- or exo-nostalgic feelings and is described as inclusive and meaningful. On the other hand, there is the 'present' community of museum professionals, for whom nostalgic discourse and talking about the past community seem to be common practices.

### Not 'Real Museum People'

Professional culture, as defined by Leena Paaskoski (2008), could be seen as a community of practice, which is tied together by shared engagement, enterprise and a repertoire of stories, concepts and styles (Wenger 1998: 72-73). According to Paaskoski, professional culture consists of and is expressed through shared customs and values 'that are commonly repeated, shown, written and talked about by the professionals' thus recreating common experiences and professional aims (Paaskoski 2008: 309). But if professional culture or organization – or the professional museum field – forms a community of practice, should it mean that all its members feel competent, recognized and 'moving on familiar ground' (Wenger 1998: 4)? Can this be achieved in reality?

*Based on the interview material, it seems clear that there are also those who are not full 'museum people', and who are not part of 'recreating common experiences'. Those interviewees, who perhaps felt like part of the community of 'museum people' – either in the present or in the past – emphasized a shared devotion and feeling of togetherness. But the term 'museum people' was also used to mark exclusion. Especially in the discourse of those who felt excluded from this community, the 'museum people' were mostly defined by their practices – doing 'proper museum work' – in which they themselves didn't participate.*

*For example, the status of the Office of Built Heritage and its employees within the*

museum field was considered ambiguous. There is one interview, where both parties had been employed in the field of Built Heritage, and they have very different ideas about how to define museum work or the museum field, and whether preservation of built cultural environment is part of it. Whereas for the interviewer it seems obvious that the interviewee, as a former employee of the National Board of Antiquities (*the Finnish name Museovirasto translates literally to Museum Bureau*), has been influential in the museum field, the interviewee himself gets bewildered when confronted with the question: 'would you like to still say something - about your life as part of the museum field?' For him the only thing connecting his activities to museums seems to be the physical working environment – the Finnish National Museum, where the Office of Built Heritage was first located when it was *founded in the mid-1960s* (Immonen 2016: 239-240). Otherwise his connections to the museum field or 'to the actual, traditional museum work, that which is done under the direction of the Museums Association, then... if they weren't non-existent then at least they were very few in the end'.<sup>15</sup>

There is also another former employee of the Office of Built Heritage, who felt that her status in relation to 'museum work' was a bit unclear. She *had started her career in the Office of Built Heritage of the Finnish Archaeological Commission in early 1960s*. The Archaeological Commission was restructured as the National Board of Antiquities in 1972, and in her own view, *the interviewee only entered the museum field 'in the narrow sense' when she started working in the Office of Museum Affairs of the brand new National Board of Antiquities. But even then she didn't herself 'do any... museum work, catalogue objects or something like that'*.<sup>16</sup> Even though she got to know the new personnel of the *National Board of Antiquities* and 'a lot of museum people around the country', she felt unrecognised, especially by the personnel of the National Museum, which was part of the same organization:

But it was considered... a little bit like... like this fortress of bureaucracy, the 5th floor where I sat... I almost felt like... like I suffered a bit from that... that I wasn't really considered to be museum people, after all.<sup>17</sup>

Wenger believes that big structures and organizations, including work places, don't form communities of practice, but instead they can be seen as *constellations of interconnected communities of practice* that can share the same historical roots and other common elements (Wenger 1998: 127). The National Board of Antiquities or the National Museum could be seen as a framework for such a constellation. On the other hand, communities of practice don't need to be homogeneous or harmonious. Instead, they can also contain a lot of disagreements, tensions and conflicts. Wenger has pointed out that a community of practice can produce otherness as well as sameness, and its members can specialize and distinguish themselves from the group still remaining a member of the community (Wenger 1998: 75-77). The key seems to be that others also recognise the existence and importance of the different member roles. As Wenger puts it, one of the indicators of a community of practice is 'knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to the enterprise' (Wenger 1998: 125-126).

In the same way as the Office of Built Heritage, the library of the National Board of Antiquities (formerly the library of the National Museum) is another unit of special knowledge: it does not quite fit in the definition of 'proper museum work' but it is still an enabler and source of information for researchers and curators working in the same organization. The distinguished role of the unit was perhaps not recognised by all, but as the interviewed librarian stresses, 'the appreciation came from individual users'. The feedback they received showed that the library was 'not only necessary but an absolutely essential part of the National Board of Antiquities'. Yet, they were not always allowed to contribute to the shared enterprise. In the librarian's opinion the organization could have made better use of the library's staff when planning exhibitions or other projects, but as the interviewer – also a librarian – points out: they 'rarely got an invitation'. They both agree that librarians have their own expert knowledge compared to curators and other museum professionals, but they still share the same basic values – or perspectives on the world (Wenger 1998: 125-126):

Interviewer: What about if you think about the values of the museum world and values of the world of libraries, or professional policies or practices or – whatever you want to call them, do you think they are similar or are they contradictory?



Interviewee: [Pause] I can't really say... They are both like... from our point of view... related to the humanistic world view, so... they don't contradict each other, in my opinion, but rather... complement each other.<sup>18</sup>

Wenger names two forms of non-participation in relation to communities of practice: peripheral and marginal. Peripheral non-participation means that a person is an outsider in relation to a community but has a chance of adopting its practices thus becoming a member. For example, interns or other young employees are in a peripheral situation. In the margins people who seek or consider themselves to be part of a community of practice are denied a possibility to act as a full member (Wenger 1998: 166-171). The librarians' situation was marginal: for them sharing the same devotion or world view was not enough to grant them full membership, and they were denied the opportunity to take part in the meaningful practices, like exhibition work. It is clear that the 'proper museum work' done by curators or conservators is more highly valued in the hierarchy, and the interviewees with different roles in relation to the museum community are yearning to be recognised as equally important members. This shows, for example, in a follow-up interview that a guard from the National Museum had herself requested. She had remembered that she wanted to still share a story in which she rescued the museum from a likely fire caused by careless repair men, and emphasized several times the importance of guards for the museum: 'Yeah, it would be nice, that... that it would be remembered, that really the guards can be important.'<sup>19</sup>

Without the recognition of other members, the same practices or elements get a different meaning. For example, those interviewees who felt nostalgic for the past criticised the contemporary work culture for increasing bureaucracy and wasting time on other than museum work. On the other hand, for the guard staff meetings provided a gateway to a larger community: 'Luckily there's all kinds of meetings more than there used to be, so we're not quite so disconnected there, on that side [exhibition rooms].'<sup>20</sup>

The space the National Museum provided, is another point of crossing meanings. Paul Jones and Suzanne MacLeod, who have studied museum architecture from a sociological point of view, conceptualize the museum as 'a dynamic space that is made meaningful through the interactions of space, objects, sociality, and the very meanings that flow from that interaction' (Jones and Macleod 2016: 208). Apparently, in the National Museum the 'flow of meanings' did not reach everyone equally. While for some the physical building signified links to other museum people or the nostalgic past, for others it created divisions. The guard remembers that her path didn't really cross with the personnel working in the office, because their work was 'on the other side', and in her opinion, they 'were like a totally different lot altogether'.

Interviewer: But you still knew who was working here, or..?

Interviewee: Well... of course we knew, yeah we saw, of course...

Interviewer: But it wasn't like working together? Or like a community?

Interviewee: We didn't... have that, no... can't say that, and you still don't have that with everyone.<sup>21</sup>

Shove, Pantzar and Watson are of the opinion that spaces are perhaps not defining elements of practices, but they are important in setting the scene in which practices are enacted. They have also observed, that places are defined by practices, and communities of practice inhabit the same practice-space (Shove et al. 2012: 133-134). The work – or practices – of the different employees guides them to use the museum space very differently, and physically separates them from each other. Consequently, one can say, that the National Museum forms very different practice-spaces, which means that as a place different communities of practice experience it quite differently.

## Tools for Museum and Identity Work

Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson suggest that practices are made of *materials*, *competences*, and *meanings*. They also argue that when the connections between these elements are broken, the practice disappears or transforms (Shove et al. 2012: 14-15, 22-25). Therefore, to study a practice one must study the lives of its elements (Shove et al. 2012: 53).

*In the case of 'museum work' as a defining practice of 'museum people', the material element seems to be of great importance. As has been mentioned, there are several cases in the interview material, where 'real' or 'proper' museum work is described as building exhibitions or cataloguing museum objects (which, interestingly, by many accounts has usually been done by interns or other temporary workers). Essentially, museum work is based on material collections. As one curator puts it:*

...because if you think of the whole – National Board of Antiquities and National Museum as one part of it – the whole starting point of it all, then already the name – its' based on the museum collections, and everything else related to that, - - archaeological research, maritime archaeology and so on.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, everything else, like the increasing bureaucracy and paper work, 'doesn't really fit' in the job description, and 'somehow started to go beside the... real point, and what is the core that this office is based on'.<sup>23</sup>

Especially in the interviews with museum curators, the museum professionals' role and 'expert knowledge' were frequently discussed. In the National Museum the curators were often appointed a special sector within the collections, such as glassware or porcelain<sup>24</sup>, and generally the interviewees considered mastering their specialist knowledge very important. As one interviewee put it, she regarded herself as an expert in her field and that was what made her job meaningful.<sup>25</sup>

*Thus, for many of the curators of the National Museum, familiarizing oneself with the museum's collections and learning how to 'hold the objects in your own hands'*<sup>26</sup> was a sort of rite of passage. Doing inventory in the storage rooms, which for a long time were scattered in the museum building and other smaller warehouses around the city, was something the new interns were often made to do. Even though the storing arrangement was not ideal, it was remembered with nostalgia.

This practice changed, however, when the central new warehouse, located outside Helsinki, was built in 1981. New regulations for reaching the collections were introduced, and albeit necessary, the new rules caused conflicts. The new head of the warehouse, who was now in control of the access, was granted a nickname 'the beast of the National Museum':

And if you just go and snatch something from a shelf, and then return it to some corner of another shelf, then it's impossible to trace. Unfortunately, not everyone has understood this, that there needs to be some Cerberus at the door, that controls all of this. So I have become rather notorious during the years.<sup>27</sup>

*It is interesting, that the same head of the warehouse, who criticized the curators for carelessness with the museum objects and disregarding the rules, also criticizes the new generation of conservators for taking things too literally and not trusting their elder's skills to handle the artefacts. She hints, that despite their theoretical education the new conservators perhaps lack experience and training in practice – disregarding, that this might have been a result of them not being allowed the same rites of passage as their elders.*

*The new generation of conservators has introduced a totally new way of overpacking that infuriates us elders. - It's partly maybe some sort of insecurity about one's own abilities to handle the artefacts, how you deal with artefacts, how you touch them, how you move them... And then I would say that you don't trust the other person's professional skills, the older one's, with years of experience - Of course the museum object is unique, and you have to respect it, but normal common sense is quite enough.*<sup>28</sup>



*The simplest reason for the annoyance that the new regulations caused, is of course, that it took more effort to get a hold of an object. But if one considers the elements of a practice, handling the museum objects was linked with certain competences and meanings: A curator is supposed to study the objects and master his/her special field of expertise – not fill in paperwork. So one could propose that when the curators were denied access to the collections in the new warehouse, it was not only their former practices that were overruled, but also their expertise and motivation that were threatened.*

As Orvar Löfgren states, ethnographic fieldwork that was carried out in the twentieth century forged part of the habitus of a modern ethnologist. The fieldwork created craftsmanship – skills that could not be taught formally – and a 'brotherhood' of researchers (Löfgren 2014: 119). Being able to use fieldwork tools, like cameras, was also important for constructing an ethnological fieldworker's identity (Gustavsson 2014: 193, see also Carman 2006: 98). As *the fieldwork tools help form a fieldworker's identity, curators might need museum objects to support their professional identity. Simplified, one could say that museum professionals need museum objects in order to be 'museum people'.*

## Conclusions

In this article I have examined how 'museum people', representing the ideal of museum workers, are constructed as a community of practice. The findings could be summarized as answers to the questions: when, where and what are 'museum people'.

To answer the last question first, museum people are what they do: museum professionals, who do 'proper' museum work with museum collections. Already the choice of interviewees in the Finnish Museum History Project reflects this view, as most of the people interviewed are in fact curators or researchers. As Reckwitz reminds us, performing a practice often requires using specific material things in a certain way, and in order to do museum work, the museum professionals need museum objects (Reckwitz 2002: 252-253). The material element of a practice is also linked with certain competences and meanings (Shove et al. 2012: 14-15). In this case, working with museum collections gains respect from other members of the community.

Although not as directly stated in the material, one could argue that 'museum people' are located in a different space in the museum field. Their practices connect them to the ethnological research field, museum building, its offices, storages, and exhibition rooms – but still in a separate practice-space than the guards, for example. For them the National Museum as a building constitutes a mutual history. For the *others*, not only what they do but also where they do it separates them from 'museum people'. Their practice-spaces are described as 'the other side' or 'a fortress of bureaucracy'.

Finally, the true 'museum people' who can focus exclusively on proper museum work, are to be found in the past. This ideal community is remembered with nostalgia, and is indicated by local lore, mutual understanding of who belongs and how each member can contribute to the shared enterprise, and shared practices and ways of doing things together (Wenger 1998: 125-126). The time aspect is an important element for the 'museum people' of the present as well. As Wenger points out, feeling part of a tradition reinforces one's identity and turns the 'monotonous and meaningless aspects of the job - into the rituals, customs, stories, events, dramas, and rhythms of community life' (Wenger 1998: 46).

It is evident, that the professional museum field – or the staff of the National Museum – does not form one community of practice. The interview material examined here reveals a hierarchy of communities, defined by proper practices, and discord between the difference ranks. Of course, a community of practice doesn't need to be harmonious or homogeneous, and whether one has a special, distinguished role within a community or is denied a full membership, is situational (Wenger 1998: 75-77). The key to becoming a member in a community of 'museum people' seems to be that one is recognised as such by others, and this is what many of the interviewees are lacking.

Even if the 'museum people' are only a thing of the past or a figment of imagination – or out of one's reach in the hierarchy of museum work – their imagined community still affects the museum professionals' identity. *Not being* 'museum people' can be a defining element of another community, and sometimes non-participation and outsidership can serve as a protective

strategy (Wenger 1998: 166-171). On the other hand, sharing even some practices or elements with this imagined community can offer a bridge to marginal or peripheral belonging. In any case, reflecting oneself to the ideal 'museum people' and their practices can be elemental for the identity work of a museum professional.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.museoliitto.fi>, accessed 9 March 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.nba.fi>, accessed 9 March 2016.
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.luomus.fi>, accessed 9 March 2016.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.kansallisgalleria.fi>, accessed 9 March 2016.
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.helsinki.fi/museologia/english/index.html>, accessed 9 March 2016. <https://www.jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/taiku/en/subjects/museology>, accessed 9 March 2016. <http://www.utu.fi/en/units/hum/units/museology/Pages/home.aspx>, accessed 9 March 2016.
- <sup>6</sup> <http://museohistoria.museoliitto.fi>, accessed 9 March 2016. Some of the interviews listed in the database have been conducted before the museum history project.
- <sup>7</sup> Ritva Wäre, interview, digital recording, 26 October 2011, Helsinki, NBA; Marketta Tamminen, interview, digital recording, 28 January 2011, Helsinki, NBA.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.museoliitto.fi/museumhistory>, accessed 9 March 2016.
- <sup>9</sup> Anja Rantala, interview, digital recording, 31 March 2008, Helsinki, FMA.
- <sup>10</sup> Paula Jaakkola, interview, digital recording, 14 June 2010, Helsinki, NBA.
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FMA = Finnish Museums Association (*Suomen Museoliitto*)

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